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Statement submitted by American Association of University Women, Armenian Relief Society, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, Feminist Majority Foundation, Girls Learn International, The Grail, International Confederation of Midwives, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Humanist and Ethical Union, International Lactation Consultant Association, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, International Union for Health Education, National Council of Women of the United States, Pan Pacific and South-East Asia Women's Association, Passionists International, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Salvation Army, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, Soroptimist International, To Love Children Educational Foundation International, World Federation for Mental Health, World ORT Union and World Young Women's Christian Association, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The Working Group on Girls is a coalition of over 80 national and international non-governmental organizations with representation at the United Nations dedicated to promoting the human rights of girls in all areas and stages of life, advancing their status and inclusion, and recognizing and developing their full potential and capabilities as partners in action.

We applaud the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, especially in its emphasis on the rights of the Girl Child, and for establishing the framework for advancing "the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of humanity." We agree now, nearly 20 years later, that this task continues to "require urgent action in the spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity."

We affirm the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women 58, particularly the call for a comprehensive approach to achieving gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment, and the human rights of all women and girls, through a stand-alone goal, to be integrated through targets and indicators to all goals, as essential to the post-2015 development framework.

We urge the rejection of all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls: sex selection, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, early, child and forced marriage, honour killings, rape — all forms of violence in all spheres, domestic and public. We have special concern for the vulnerability of girls with regards to sexual exploitation, both in the media, and more explicitly through human trafficking, the nature of which is changing and exacerbated with increased economic stress and high levels of poverty, in addition to more dispersed venues for exploitation.

We uphold the human rights of girls in all phases of the life cycle and the promotion and development of their full potential and self-determination in all aspects of daily life, from the right to universal birth registration, the provision of quality health services, education from primary to tertiary, the right to safety and freedom from violence, the opportunity to achieve economic stability and independence through productive employment and access to financial resources, and the provision of social protections to ensure economic security. We reject all forms of discrimination outlined in the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the ongoing work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

We recognize that changing deep cultural attitudes requires a multi-dimensional approach and dedicated supports in public and private sectors. It also requires the meaningful commitment to dialogue and action — women and men, girls and boys, families and communities together — in addition to institutional commitments and support. The Beijing Platform stressed the importance of educating families re: the importance of respecting and empowering girls to achieve their full potential and ending harmful practices that affect their health and psycho-social, spiritual, educational and economic well-being and development. It stressed the need to uphold girls' rights as fundamental human rights. Grassroots efforts aimed at helping communities understand these rights and the detrimental effects of discrimination and harmful practices on the overall development and advancement of girls have been successful in many instances and need continued sport.

We have deep concern that the feminization of poverty persists and was insufficiently addressed in the Millennium Development Goals. Women and girls are often reliant on an informal economy or left to engage in the unpaid work of family care. Girls carry an inordinate share of domestic tasks, which (in addition to lack of safe travel and inadequate sanitation facilities), curtails their attendance in school at an early age, and further limits their prospects of obtaining the skills necessary for decent employment. In regions that continue to have high rates of extreme poverty, and/or high rates of vulnerable or no employment, women and girls also have little or no social protections. Data consistently indicates that a higher number of women than men experience this insecurity. The right to education, vocational training, decent employment, land ownership, inheritance, financial resources/decision-making, and the implementation of social protection systems is vitally necessary to support women's and girls' economic security. Likewise, equal sharing of family care roles and the creation of social institutions and services to support families, are essential.

Special attention to domestic workers is also needed, many of whom are teens who migrate for employment in order to support themselves and/or their families. These girls are extremely vulnerable to being trafficked, or without protection from unfair and exploitive employer practices and often imposed isolation from the community.

In the area of girls' health, strong political will and the commitment to training and resources is needed to reverse both child and maternal mortality rates. Most of these deaths are considered preventable, and critical strategies include increased prenatal care and delivery with the assistance of a skilled health attendant. We urge Post-2015 efforts be intensified to utilize these strategies to reach all women and girls, especially those living in poverty and most vulnerable in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, which carry the highest burden in both child and maternal mortality. We also note reports that adolescent childbearing remains high, and this brings increased health risks for girls (as well as missed education and work opportunities). Likewise, risky sexual behaviour among adolescents and young adults also remains high, necessitating further development of quality programs of integral sexual education, working with families and communities for support. This is particularly important with regards to HIV/AIDS infection, as adolescent girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to infection, and will also often face stigma, discrimination, and violence as a result. Millennium Development Goals data indicate that the number of women living with HIV has been increasing steadily since 2001.

Girls' voices must be represented in all areas of civic life: education, employment, health, safety, economics, technology, the environment, and peace building in order to achieve equality, empowerment and guarantee of their human rights. They must be able to participate in all levels of decision-making, planning, and problem-solving in all spheres to ensure that gender perspectives are incorporated into all areas of development. They are especially vital to the development of Peace and Security, particularly in areas of high conflict or disaster, and in refugee resettlements where girls are most vulnerable. We also affirm their contributions to the peace movement and their efforts to promote international cooperation towards the reduction of nuclear arms. We urge that the inclusion of such efforts be reinstated in the post-2015 framework for sustainable development.

We urge Member States to take immediate and effective measures to secure and eliminate the worst forms of child labour as defined in the International Labor Organization Convention, Article 4, and to end child labour in all its forms, including recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Girls are critical yet overlooked partners in development who cannot be left behind. Without their voices and meaningful participation, without the political will and commitment of resources to end all violence and discrimination against them and promote equal opportunities for their advancement, there can be no real sustainable development. We urge that the human rights and empowerment of all girls, everywhere, be integrated throughout all targets and indicators of the post-2015 framework to ensure their progress and agency towards self-determination.